ASR Forum: What's New in African Cinema?

Neoliberal Rationalities in Old and New Nollywood

Moradewun Adejunmobi

Abstract: This article focuses on shifts, or "new waves," within contemporary African film as sites of struggle and moments of exposure of the divergent forces at work in the struggle. From this perspective, attempts at initiating a new style in commercially oriented storytelling do not so much culminate in a break with previous styles of storytelling as they create a new space for tension over ideological claims and narrative coherence. As illustration, the article considers the competing logics at work in the strategies or rationalities associated with the branch of Nigerian filmmaking described as New Nollywood.

Résumé: Cet article se concentre sur des changements, ou de "nouvelles vagues," dans le cinéma africain contemporain perçu comme sites de lutte et moments de révélation des forces divergentes à l'œuvre dans la lutte. Dans cette perspective, les tentatives de lancement d'un nouveau style dans la narration à vocation commerciale, représente moins une cassure avec les styles narratifs précédents, qu'il ne crée un nouvel espace pour une tension entre revendications idéologiques et cohérence narrative. A titre d'illustration, l'article examine les logiques concurrentes à l'œuvre dans les stratégies ou rationalités associées avec la branche de cinéma nigérian décrit sous le nom de Nouveau Nollywood.

Keywords: Nollywood; neoliberalism; structural adjustment; modernity; popular culture

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In his 2010 book on early twenty-first century trends in African filmmaking, Manthia Diawara proposes a taxonomy for distinguishing strands in what he calls a "new wave of African cinema" (2010:97). The taxonomy draws on the geographic location of filmmakers, the politics of production, intended audiences, festivals and distribution, and perhaps most important, approaches to film language. In this article I would like to propose additional perspectives for making sense of shifts within contemporary African film, especially in a popular cinema that Diawara positions within and alongside the new wave of African cinema. These additional perspectives require us to approach new waves not only in terms of the formal properties of the resulting works, but also by attending to each new wave as a site for struggle and a moment of exposure of the divergent forces at work in the struggle. This approach provides some context for understanding the emergence of the branch of filmmaking in Nigeria called "New Nollywood," and the efforts being undertaken to differentiate it from what has now become "Old Nollywood."

Within Nollywood and other popular cinemas across Africa, there are, then, attempts at creating and demarcating new waves of filmmaking. In this article I consider the significance of indicators and actions signifying the creation of a particular kind of new wave in commercial and popular filmmaking, founded in this case on a quest for improved production values. Specifically, where the conditions informing production and reception of imaginative texts have not undergone substantial change, indicators pointing to a new wave or new direction often bring to light disagreements over how to account for the gaps between diverse ideological claims and everyday experience. In such circumstances, attempts to initiate a new style of popular storytelling do not so much culminate in a break with previous styles of storytelling as they create a new site for tension and strain over ideological claims and narrative coherence. The result is often an extended struggle to generate ideological and narrative congruence out of incongruent elements. And the new style of popular storytelling itself embodies a contesting and contested search for alternative modes of engagement where the conditions of production have proved more or less resistant to restructuring and change.

In approaching the new wave as an outcome of exertion seeking to achieve congruence between ideology and narrative, I take my cues from Karin Barber's study of responses to the oil boom in Nigeria during the late 1970s as expressed in plays staged in the Yoruba traveling theater tradition. Quoting Pierre Macherey, Barber notes that literature, and by extension imaginative narrative, "bears the imprint of the conditions of its production." For her, imaginative narrative is, in a sense, a work, or "the outcome of labour performed by an author" on "ideological materials—that are available in the particular position in society that he or she occupies" (1982:432). The author, states Barber, is often engaged in a struggle to organize the diverse ideological materials at his or her disposal into a coherent vision or narrative of the society being depicted. Rather frequently,

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though, gaps and non sequiturs appear in the narration, highlighting the points at which the narrative represented comes up short in its attempts to account for a particular ideological vision and to explain the way things are. We might describe this process of seeking congruence between ideology and narrative as one of rationalization, especially to the extent that popular narratives are almost always seeking to account for the gap between lived experience and the claims of the dominant order. Imaginative rationalizations of an ascendant order are not specific to neoliberalism or limited to any one era. In every age, popular culture retains its popularity, in part, to the extent that it offers locally meaningful interpretations for the otherwise inexplicable inadequacies of taken-for-granted social dispositions. From that perspective, narratives emanating from the realm of popular culture are often engaged in rationalization: making excuses, but also justifying. It is in this respect that I seek to understand the neoliberal rationalities of both New and Old Nollywood.

New and Old Nollywood

The most authoritative histories of Nollywood trace its emergence to the crises affecting the media and other institutions following the adoption of Structural Adjustment Programs in Nigeria starting in the mid-1980s.[1] Critical features of the Structural Adjustment Programs deployed in Nigeria and elsewhere in Africa and Latin America are now widely associated with neoliberal policy.[2] These include, but are not limited to, liberalization of markets, currency deregulation, privatization of public services, reduction in state expenditure, and the retrenchment of the state. The emergence of Nollywood in an economic climate characterized by growing informalization of labor would seem to confirm a trend observed by Harvey (2005) when he identifies cultural industries as the ascendant areas of production in neoliberalizing economies.[3] Whether and how neoliberal policymaking might affect the production and content of cinema and television around the world has been the subject of recent publications.[4] This article follows in the footsteps of these previous studies, while focusing in particular on the ways in which aesthetic shifts in popular culture can be positioned in relation to ongoing socioeconomic projects.

By way of introduction to some of the distinctive features of the earlier style of Nollywood storytelling, now described as Old Nollywood, we might consider the representation of modernity and temporality in these films. If being modern in neoliberal Africa involves "not simply . . . a shared historical present, but . . . a social status implying certain institutional and economic conditions of life" (Ferguson 2006:168), Old Nollywood films often intimated that though Africans aspire to modernity, attainment of this goal involves a lengthy struggle whose outcome is far from certain. Indeed, many Old Nollywood films cater to the visual pleasure of desired access to modernity by exhibiting its supposed bounty—grand homes, stylish clothing, and expensive cars—as obtained frequently through vice and debauchery. They

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also link the acquisition of these "spoils" of modernity to egregious violations within the moral economy that call for appropriate penalties and the ultimate forfeiture of the "spoils."[5] In *Girls Cot* (2006), for example, a group of female undergraduates resort to prostitution, extortion, impersonation, and robbery to fund their lavish lifestyle. Though much of the film focuses on the ability of these women to wreak havoc on the finances of wealthy older men, and the material profits accruing to them from a life of extortion, the young women are in the end apprehended by the police, and their train of deception is brought to a halt. Modernity operates here as a chimera that can never quite be grasped.

Old Nollywood films with an explicit or implicitly evangelical orientation offer a variation on this approach to the question of modernity. In order to enjoy the benefits of middle-class African living, usually associated here with blissful monogamy in well-appointed homes and a firm detachment from the imprecations of extended kin, protagonists are often called upon to "make a complete break with the past"—an observation made by Birgit Meyer (1998) in her discussion of popular pentecostal discourse in Ghana and West Africa as a whole. These narratives privilege the notion of a decisive rupture with any conduct and practices that could fortify a character's connections with the expansive and shadowy domain of tradition and draw inspiration from evangelical doctrine that highlights the need for conversion and rupture. As Meyer points out, "the appeal to 'time' as an epistemological category enables pentecostalists to draw a rift between 'us' and 'them,' 'now' and 'then,' 'modern and traditional,' and 'of course, 'God' and the 'Devil'" (1998:317). The desire for wealth, the failure to cut off extended family, and/or sexual misconduct provide the usual avenues for protagonists to fall into the grip of forces aligned with an always malevolent incarnation of tradition, which then deprives them of access to the expected benefits of modernity.

Old Nollywood emerges from a particular mode of film financing, production, and distribution. Haynes (2014) traces the break between Old Nollywood and New Nollywood, beginning in 2010, to a crisis of overproduction that had become pronounced by 2007 and was resulting in lower revenues for filmmakers.[6] This state of affairs led a handful of filmmakers to abandon what they considered a defunct model of filmmaking for a more economically sustainable and stylistically distinctive approach. The makers of New Nollywood films like Kunle Afolayan, Obi Emelonye, and Mahmood Ali-Balogun have taken to exploring alternative modes of financing, production, and exhibition: in other words, new approaches to the work of making films. In varied interviews they also have been at pains to distinguish themselves from the majority of Nigerian filmmakers and to highlight their plans for introducing higher standards in Nigerian filmmaking as a way of moving the film industry in a new direction. The most visible markers of New Nollywood thus far have been the emphasis on initial theatrical exhibition, an avoidance of the straight-to-video format that characterized Old Nollywood, and most important, the pursuit of higher production values.[7]

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This in turn has led to many innovations at the level of content and aesthetics. Among the innovations to be noted, New Nollywood filmmakers differ from Old Nollywood directors in their preference for unique stories departing from the "genre of the moment" approach, and in their avoidance of the many narrative devices that had come to typify Old Nollywood's style of storytelling, such as the killing off, or at least punishing, of a character with moral flaws in order to obtain a happy ending.

Thus, for example, Obi Emelonye, a New Nollywood filmmaker, decided to make Nigeria's first film about an airplane crash, *Last Flight to Abuja* (2012). Like American disaster films, much of the film consists of extended scenes portraying the fear of the crew and passengers once it becomes clear that the crew have lost control of the plane. Unlike an American plane crash film, however, and in a peculiarly "Nigerian" style of happy ending, everyone survives the crash except for one passenger, Mr. Adesola, who just so happens to be guilty of embezzlement of company funds and manslaughter. When the film was shown at the Nollywoodweek film festival in Paris in June 2013, a spirited debate broke out within the audience and later among other New Nollywood film directors as to whether this was an appropriate ending.[8] On one side was Kunle Afolayan, another New Nollywood filmmaker, who argued that he would have killed off all the passengers in the plane in order to secure a more dramatic and possibly ambiguous ending. On the other side was Obi Emelonye, who said that he had learned from another veteran Nigerian filmmaker, Tunde Kelani, that it was "important to give our people hope." This type of ending, which imposes quick judgment on a character with moral flaws, is one that many observers would identify with Old Nollywood. Many, though not all, New Nollywood films appear to aim for a different kind of "happy" ending, one that is often more open-ended, less didactic, and less predictable. But even within individual New Nollywood films, as is the case in *Last Flight to Abuja,* there are apparently incongruous elements and narrative fissures that might be considered leftover debris from the difficult struggle to wrest diegetic congruence from the ideological materials available to the filmmaker.

Scholars like Jonathan Haynes (2014) point to an emerging rapprochement between New Nollywood and other forms of African cinema, such that New Nollywood has become less "Nollywood" and more "African cinema." These films are often less accessible within Nigeria itself then they are elsewhere and deliberately avoid or seek to subvert the narrative devices identified with Nollywood.[9] Nonetheless, despite some movement in this direction, Old and New Nollywood continue to share a few elements. Chief among these is a tendency to make locally generated questions and concerns the primary focus of the film. The fact that both Old and New Nollywood draw most of their financing from within Nigeria, either from small businesses or from multinational corporations with significant business interests in Nigeria, is at least one reason to think that overlaps in this area will not soon disappear. However, a noticeable split in narrative orientation has gradually emerged between New and Old Nollywood when

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it comes to the types of locally generated questions that drive thematic development in the films. In this respect, both New and Old Nollywood offer different, but also locally significant, interpretations of neoliberal life in contemporary Africa.

The media, says Laurie Ouellette (2008) in her discussion of American reality television shows, are one of the main sites for the production of neoliberal subjects. This observation may be even more applicable for parts of Africa where the media not only produce neoliberal subjects, but also may be one of the few institutions capable of creating locally plausible narratives about the neoliberal subject. If Old (and early) Nollywood often constructed the neoliberal subject and became famous for foregrounding a preoccupation with occult economies, and then more broadly with moral economies in the African postcolony, New Nollywood, by contrast, has shown itself to be more invested in economies of self-governance and unfettered subjectivity as these are played out in neoliberal Africa.[10] In what follows, I offer some initial thoughts on differences in the ways in which Nigerian films described as New and Old Nollywood make sense of and engage with the effects of neoliberal politics.

Rationalizing Affluence

The representation of wealth—and specifically, attitudes toward the acquisition of wealth—is perhaps the most salient index of the ideological shift from Old to New Nollywood. A preoccupation with wealth is by no means new in Nigerian popular culture, as illustrated in Karin Barber's 1982 article on reactions to the "petronaira" boom in Yoruba traveling theater of the 1970s. But where Yoruba traveling theater from the oil boom years could still ponder the differences between wealth acquired through legitimate means and wealth acquired illegitimately, the notion of multiple pathways to wealth had all but vanished in the 1990s when Nigeria's video film industry came into existence. Nonetheless, Old Nollywood continued to give considerable attention to stories about the acquisition of wealth. Indeed, many early Nollywood films have been described as deeply aspirational (see Adejunmobi 2002). And by the time New Nollywood made its appearance as the first decade of the twenty-first century was coming to an end, representations of wealth in Nigerian popular culture had undergone further modification.

Thus, while Old Nollywood films often focused on the extended struggle to acquire wealth, usually by foul means, New Nollywood presents middle-class characters who take a certain level of affluence for granted.[11] Old Nollywood films such as the now famous *Living in Bondage* (1993) or *Billionaire's Club* (2003) portrayed the pursuit of wealth as the domain of occult economies requiring the subjection of protagonists to magical forces and the betrayal of obligations to conjugal and consanguinal kin. In the words of Edmund Andrews (cited by Jean and John Comaroff [1999:281]), these are often stories about "the magical allure of making money from nothing." And when diegetic

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progression in Old Nollywood films did not depend on occult economies for ideological coherence, it foregrounded the morality claims of what Ekeh (1975:92) calls the "primordial public." Starting with an early Nollywood film like *Glamour Girls* (1994), and extending to the more recent types of films that Haynes describes as "campus films" and then to a related genre that might be called "runs films" (i.e., films about prostitution), many films associated with Old Nollywood enact violations of moral codes as egregious as any found in the occult-themed films, but without recourse to magical powers.[12] To the extent that a desire for economic mobility and/or "modernity" accounts for most of these violations of moral codes, one would not be far off the mark in describing these films as privileging a concern with the moral economy.

By contrast, the central conflict in New Nollywood narratives seldom revolves around the steps that must be taken to escape poverty. For this reason (among others), New Nollywood films do not focus on contractors, "chiefs," and politicians who may have acquired wealth by devious means. Instead, the wealthy characters in many New Nollywood films are employed professionals comfortably positioned in the middle class and enjoying a quality of life in almost all respects identical to what one might associate with the middle class in the global North. In *Tango with Me* (2010), for example, a recently married couple (Uzo, a bank manager, and Lola, a teacher in a private elementary school) struggle over whether to keep a pregnancy when Lola is raped by intruders on their wedding night. Though they live in very comfortable surroundings, the film makes no allusion to their material possessions or the source of their wealth. This represents a clear divergence from Old Nollywood films, in which the wealthy were not usually doctors, attorneys, and bankers, but desperate individuals whose wealth came from mysterious sources and was displayed by the conspicuous consumption that was often a prominent visual feature.

Kunle Afolayan's *The Figurine* (2009), considered by some to be the first successful example of the New Nollywood mode of filmmaking, provides an even clearer instantiation of the transition from Old to New Nollywood with regard to the specific question of occult economies. References to the occult economy are present in this film, especially in relation to Araromire, an abandoned figurine that supposedly brings seven years of good fortune followed by seven years of ill fortune to those who keep it in their possession. Here again a young couple, Sola and his wife, Mona (and their friends), enjoy a high standard of living with apparently no concern for sources of revenue to fund their many leisure activities. When early in the film Sola's professional prospects suddenly begin to improve despite his visibly poor work ethic, Sola interprets this as mere coincidence, unrelated to his appropriation of a dusty figurine discovered during a forest trek with his friend Femi.[13] And when, seven years later, Sola's businesses begin to fail, he does not diagnose the sudden downward spiral in his professional life as related to the figurine. Indeed, he emphatically repudiates any spiritual explanation for the reversals in his business undertakings.

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On the one hand, then, the film acknowledges the prominence of the occult economy as narrative trope in Nollywood films through Sola's wife, Mona, who attributes to the figurine the misfortunes that suddenly start to befall her family. On the other hand, the film self-consciously subverts the value of this trope by surrounding Mona with characters like Sola, who does not share her beliefs, or, Femi, who deliberately stokes Mona's fears in order to separate her from her husband. The ending of the film scrupulously avoids privileging either Sola's or Mona's interpretation of the misfortunes. In so doing, *The Figurine* exhibits the kind of ambiguity that Afolayan himself recommended to Emelonye in the heated debate over narrative resolution in Emelonye's *Last Flight to Abuja*. Perhaps even more significantly, *The Figurine* represents the first major attempt in recent Nigerian filmmaking to call into question the reflexive privileging of occult economies or violations within the moral economy in accounting for successful or failed economic mobility.

Science of the Self

James Ferguson (2009) contends that some of the claimed outcomes for neoliberal governance observed elsewhere might not apply to the African experience with Structural Adjustment. In particular he has questioned whether notions of "responsibilized prudential subjects," discussed in what he calls "Anglo–Foucauldian" theorizing on neoliberalism, has any relevance for the African situation (2009:172–73). In response, I would suggest that one of the spaces in Africa where we do see a propagation of such notions is in the newer imaginative narratives emanating from diverse film and television industries. It is worth noting that a number of the reality television program franchises focused on competition that have been identified as playing a prominent role in popularizing the ideal of the self-governing subject in North America and Europe have been enthusiastically adopted by the growing media enterprises in Africa. These include such shows as *Big Brother Africa*, *Africa's Next Top Model*, *Idols South Africa*, *Idols West Africa*, *Survivor South Africa*, *Nigeria's Got Talent*, and many others. Obviously these television shows construct a world far removed from the everyday lives of most Africans. Nonetheless, and perhaps precisely for that reason, they have proved immensely popular with the viewing public for pay television across sub-Saharan Africa.

Many New Nollywood films would appear to exhibit a similar level of confidence in the principles of self-governance that are privileged in neoliberal policy.[14] The contrasts between Old and New Nollywood are especially germane here. If the characters in New Nollywood do not labor with the goal of overcoming economic insufficiency, and are consequently no longer subject to the dictates of either occult or moral economies, what then informs their conduct and compels them to act in specific ways?[15] By and large protagonists in these films are engaged in a process of self-discovery and self-affirmation for personal benefit. At stake here is what Barbara

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Cruikshank calls "the science of the self" (1993:239), although in reference to the African subject I would prefer to call this concern "the arts of the self." The subjectivity of New Nollywood film characters evolves in a setting in which they are always more than disempowered pawns caught in the thralldom of kin and/or of magical forces. The general principles of neoliberalism would seem to accord with the expansive scope afforded these protagonists for making sense of their own lives and charting their own path. According to Nikolas Rose, an advanced liberal democracy or neoliberal order "does not aim to govern through society, but through the regulated choices of individual citizens." He adds that in such regimes, "individuals are to become experts of themselves" (2006:147). We see this process of interrogating and ultimately mastering the self illustrated in *Tango with Me*, where dramatic tension initially derives from the struggle over whether to keep the baby or have an abortion, and subsequently from the aftermath of a decision to keep a pregnancy emanating from rape. Much of the film is dedicated to the soul-searching triggered by the rape and unintended pregnancy. Not surprisingly, and in keeping with neoliberal tenets, the film emphasizes that even when one is confronted with emotional and bodily trauma, outcomes depend on the choices available. Lola, the rape victim, makes a difficult decision and abides with the consequences, which, after many twists and turns, turn out well for her.

Similarly in another Emelonye film, *Mirror Boy* (2011), the protagonist, a schoolboy called Tijan, has to make his own choices. Instead of following his mother through a crowded market in The Gambia, Tijan, who was born and has grown up in England, chooses to follow a shadowy figure called the "mirror boy" who tells him that he has to follow his own path to achieve his destiny. Tijan has to become an expert of himself, and not even his mother can accomplish this on his behalf. As such, the interaction between Tijan and this shadowy and magically endowed figure is defined by argument and negotiation rather than by compulsion and supernatural power. The outcomes for characters in films like these depend not on structural constraints, but on the choices that they make. Everyone in these stories is free and invited to engage in what Diane Negra and Yvonne Tasker (2013:348) call "self-fashioning." In contrast to Old Nollywood, where protagonists invariably made bad choices for which they were judged, New Nollywood films present characters who have the freedom to make good choices for which they are rewarded. And even if a character takes a wrong turn, the choice has usually been made in the absence of compulsion.

If Old Nollywood's melodramas represented individual responses to structural constraints, New Nollywood's alternative palette of stories offers portraits of individuals endowed with initiative in a world without constraints. The central conflicts are often the product of happenstance and/or serendipity rather than social destiny. In *Tango with Me*, no one could have anticipated that armed robbers would break into Lola and Uzo's hotel room on their wedding night and rape Lola. In *Phone Swap* (2012), by Kunle Afolayan, no one could have anticipated that Mary and Akin would bump

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into each other in a crowded airport, drop their phones, and accidentally pick up each other's phone, leading to a series of misdirected communications and unplanned encounters. And even despite Nigeria's poor safety record in the aviation sector, the plane crash that occurs in *Last Flight to Abuja* is presented not as typical, but as unusual and therefore unanticipated. In the commonplace economies of self-governance and autonomous subjectivity of New Nollywood films, the only deficits that propel the narrative forward are highly individualized. They apply to individuals rather than to a community. Therefore, instead of protagonists seeking to escape unemployment, poverty, and the like, one finds characters with either overriding personal strengths and/or shortcomings that loom large and operate as pre-texts to the main narrative. In *Phone Swap*, for example, the protagonists already show their ineptitude at contracting and sustaining beneficial relationships before they bump into each other in a crowded airport. In *Tango with Me* Lola is already a woman with strong religious convictions at the start of the film, as evidenced by her decision not to engage in premarital sex. Those convictions are subsequently tested in the struggle over whether to keep a pregnancy resulting from rape.

Nikolas Rose says that the formula of rule in neoliberal governance requires that societies seek to "'de-governmentalize' the state and to de-statize practices of government" (2006:147). In other words, individual citizens do best when they do not rely on the state. New Nollywood films reflect this process of de-governmentalization. For example, when Tijan abandons his mother in the market and to all intents and purposes disappears, his mother rushes to the local police. Though we are now in The Gambia, we encounter a police force that is as functional as the police force in Britain, and it immediately convenes a press conference to disseminate information about the missing boy. However, it is Tijan himself, making his own choices, and not the functional police force, who orchestrates the events that lead to a reunification with his mother. Likewise, in *Phone Swap* we encounter a character who has to make critical decisions in her life. Cynthia is a police officer whom we meet when she apprehends Akin with his supposedly stolen phone. But almost immediately the story cuts away from Cynthia's professional life, working for the state, to her home life, where she has to figure out a way to save her marriage. These scenarios all illustrate what Ouellette and Hay call "individualized responsibility" (2008:473). The challenge here is not so much that of escaping dependency on welfare programs, as might be the case in the increasingly postwelfare regimes in parts of Europe and the United States. Rather, it is a question of pursuing self-discovery for its own sake and succeeding on one's own, even given the availability of a supposedly functional government bureaucracy.

Unlike some American television shows and films, then, Nollywood (both Old and New) rarely offers scenes of governmental processes such as one sees in American court and police dramas (see Ouellette 2008). And for good reason: making a credible drama of that kind while concentrating on the choices made by citizens, rather than on the dysfunctionality of state

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services, would be a challenge even for New Nollywood. The most extensive courtroom drama thus far in New Nollywood unfolds in an American courtroom in the film *Ijé* (2010) by Chineze Anyaene, in which Anya, the Nigerian wife of an elderly white American, stands trial for supposedly murdering him. But even here, the heart of the story lies in the acts of her younger sister, Chioma, who uncovers evidence leading to Anya's exoneration. Likewise, and for entirely different reasons, Old Nollywood, too, has tended not to produce procedural dramas, preferring, for example, stories about armed robbery and armed robbers that provide ample opportunity for plausible engagement with the moral economy more than representations of skillful and or heroic police action.[16]

In many respects, then, "New" Nollywood films embrace the ethos of neoliberal orthodoxy more fully than Old Nollywood films do, and they echo many of the claims of both "African Renaissance" and "Africa Rising" discourses.[17] Africa would indeed appear to be rising thanks to the freedoms that individuals have to make choices about what is best for their own lives without interference from an overbearing state. Old Nollywood, by contrast, often defaulted to a melodrama based on stark moral polarities and the moral occult in seeking to make sense of the neoliberal present in Africa.[18] Through this particular narrative orientation, Old Nollywood films try to come to terms with the unruly outcomes of encounters between an "optimistic faith in free enterprise" and the unpredictability of opportunity for social and economic mobility in the neoliberal postcolony (Comaroff & Comaroff 1999:294). However, while the magical outcomes depicted seem to make sense to local audiences (judging by the frequent recycling of stories focusing on the moral occult), they clearly exceed the scope of the neoliberal script as defined by domestic and expatriate policymakers.

Convergence and Divergence

Nonetheless, some areas of incommensurability remain between the New Nollywood portrait of life in contemporary Africa and the vision of the African present proposed by neoliberal orthodoxy. In particular, New Nollywood films diverge from "African Renaissance" and "Africa Rising" discourses about Africa, as well as other developmentalist narratives about the continent, in their understanding of Africa's place in global time. Notwithstanding their apparent praise for Africa's recent accomplishments in political economy, these discourses are still haunted by suppositions of an African temporal lag and, many argue, are intended more to justify neoliberal policy than to reposition Africa in global time.

"Africa," remarks Ferguson (2006:176), "always seems to come to the question of modernity from without." New Nollywood films explicitly reject this premise by declining to offer stories about an Africa that is in the process of emerging (see Ferguson 1999). As such, in New Nollywood films, as we have seen, members of the middle class have not recently escaped from some prior condition of poverty; New Nollywood takes the existence of a

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middle class for granted, so that it is the affective life of the middle class, rather than their class antecedents or affluence, that is a frequent subject matter of these films.[19] Likewise, when what is construed as indigenous African culture makes an appearance in these films, it is not presented as a vestige from a bygone time to be superseded in the near future. Rather it helps characters find their place in the current time and in the larger world. For example, in *Mirror Boy*, Tijan's encounter with the shadowy figure who turns out to be a reincarnation of his father as a youth helps him to make sense of his identity as someone born outside Africa and preparing for a return to life in the U.K. Both Tijan and the "mirror boy" co-exist in the same time frame. We see something similar in the first Nollywood musical, *Inalé* (2010), in which an African folktale is told by an American grandfather to his granddaughter. The African folktale is thus positioned alongside American bedtime stories as a universal way of composing narratives from the past and explaining the past to children.

In explicitly evangelical Old Nollywood films, impediments to realizing the promise of modernity are almost always affiliated with what is represented as tradition, and access to middle-class standards of living often depends, therefore, on choosing between discordant temporalities. This fairly constant opposition in Old Nollywood films between the pursuit of modernity and the countervailing force of tradition is all but absent from New Nollywood films. In this respect, one might fruitfully compare the young and relatively prosperous couples in Old Nollywood's evangelical films with the couple in *Tango with Me*, who make no reference to the sphere of tradition or the occult in clarifying their own productive or regressive decisions. Unlike the Old Nollywood film characters who struggled to free themselves from the weight of tradition, the protagonists in the New Nollywood film are gifted with a level of agency and opportunity for maneuver that contrasts with the limited options of their predecessors.

While New Nollywood's prominence is growing within and beyond Nigeria, it is important to emphasize that Old Nollywood has not disappeared or ceased to produce films focused on diverse violations of local moral codes, often for the sake of material acquisition. Indeed, outside of the kind of high-cost scripted media associated with New Nollywood, filmic narratives about effortless affluence in a neoliberal era begin to break down, with the result that gaps between ideology and lived experience continue to be filled in by references to the occult, and to swift judgment over immorality. In lower cost Nollywood films that still circulate widely on VCD and television, and even in some of the more expensive films, the recourse to disease, insanity, death, and social disgrace to effect narrative resolution and appropriate retribution for moral lapses remains a valorized storytelling device.[20] Evidently New Nollywood films do not share the sense of moral panic that is characteristic of Old Nollywood films and that sustains Old Nollywood engagement with both occult and moral economies. But if that is so, we may legitimately inquire to what New Nollywood films owe

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their equanimity—that is, their apparent lack of postmodern pessimism or at least postmodern disquiet (Comaroff & Comaroff 2000)—given the continuing discrepancy between what the ideology of the dominant order promises and what most people experience.

One could describe New Nollywood filmmakers as true believers in the proposition that individual effort coupled with advanced formal education guarantees middle-class prosperity. As a solution to problems arising from the extreme informalization of the film business in Nigeria, New Nollywood filmmakers therefore propose the deployment of expertise. Relying on technical proficiency demonstrated within their own films, these filmmakers hope to address problems that would seem to emanate from the haphazard structuring of the local film industry. By virtue of their own more extensive formal education with additional training in filmmaking and/or the dramatic arts, New Nollywood filmmakers lay claim to a more technically sophisticated practice of cinematography.[21] And as such, the New Nollywood identity is constructed around the pursuit of technical sophistication. These are filmmakers conscious of possessing what has been called "read-write" multimedia literacy and thus having overtaken a generation of Nollywood "professionals" with "read-only" multimedia literacy.[22] Kunle Afolayan probably offers the best example of the kind of credentials that New Nollywood filmmakers can, or would like to, mobilize in creating a Nigerian new wave: someone with university-level education in accounting who is a director and actor with his own production company, who has formal training in filmmaking and hails from a family of performers and filmmakers.[23]

In interviews about their films, New Nollywood directors are often more likely to hold forth about technical details, such as the kinds of camera used to shoot the film, than they are to speak about the story. They clearly privilege a "discourse of connoisseurship" (Pierson 2002:53) intended not only to impress, but also to wean local spectators away from their unhealthy tolerance for Old Nollywood's lack of technical sophistication. The fact that the predominant discourse surrounding this new wave in Nigerian filmmaking pertains specifically to production values indicates not just a concern for technical expertise, but also a degree of confidence in the ability of technocratic competence to secure a radically different outcome for these films when compared with Old Nollywood productions. A conviction that formal proficiency and individual exertion ensure middle-class prosperity clearly resonates with select audiences in Nigeria and the African diaspora. Perhaps because New Nollywood films are initially and sometimes only shown in cinema theaters with fairly expensive ticket prices, they currently attract a somewhat wealthier and more highly educated public than Old Nollywood films. The belief that credentialed expertise combined with wise choices ensures stability of economic returns may be more salient for a public relying on precisely these attributes for countering the persistent instability associated with liberalization as currently experienced in the "Africa Rising" economies.

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Nonetheless, while New Nollywood may diverge from both neoliberal orthodoxy and Old Nollywood on the question of Africa's place in time, there are continuing points of convergence between Old and New Nollywood. If, as Barber suggests, the imaginative narrative "bears the imprint of the conditions of its production," then one might note in the case of New Nollywood that the much advertised break with the conditions of production and exhibition that typified Old Nollywood has not fully materialized. Corporate sponsors who had lined up to fund Afolayan's *Phone Swap* later abandoned this and other planned projects, leaving Afolayan to scramble for alternative financing (see Haynes 2014; Curry 2010). Despite some growth in the number of cinema theaters in Nigeria, producers of the more expensive New Nollywood films still cannot guarantee that theatrical distribution within Nigeria will suffice in order to recoup the cost of production and make a profit.[24] Furthermore, not even the most sophisticated encryption technologies paid for by New Nollywood film directors have been able to stem the tide of piracy in Nigeria and further loss of anticipated revenue.[25] Summarizing his survey of the financial challenges facing New Nollywood producers and directors, Haynes (2014:59) crisply concludes that "this is not a game for the fainthearted." As one might expect, telltale signs attesting to the unfinished business of formalizing the film production value chain in Nigeria, and the problems of catering to an increasingly segmented local film audience, are easy to detect in many New Nollywood narratives. If attention to the often inexact fit between the ideology of the dominant order and everyday experience, or between labor and the anticipated dividends of labor, is the price to be paid when the goal is ensuring broad-based popular appeal for a fictional narrative, then fictional narratives must provide plausible rationalities for the inexact fit or forego the ability to generate broad-based popular appeal.

Emelonye's explanation for why, with the exception of a single flawed character, so many passengers survive the plane crash in *Last Flight to Abuja* suggests that prominent New Nollywood filmmakers have not quite divested themselves from Old Nollywood storytelling paradigms. And for good reason: New Nollywood filmmakers continue to work under similar constraints in a business characterized by a high degree of uncertainty. Given continuing unpredictability in their profession despite various attempts at stabilizing the local film industry, one can understand that New Nollywood filmmakers aiming for profitable films remain attracted to familiar interpretations for the seemingly persistent disjuncture between their own professed expertise and the actual returns on such expertise.

Emelonye's concern for giving hope to local audiences in *Last Flight to Abuja* speaks to an interest in reconciling official proclamations about an increasingly prosperous nation with the lived reality of a country where economic insufficiency is the norm and airplane crashes occur with alarming frequency. We might recall here that the only individual who perishes in the airplane crash had turned to fraud and blackmail to bankroll a high standard of living, despite secure employment in the financial industry.

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In the end, not finding another way to account for unfulfilled economic aspirations, regular airplane crashes, and ensuing deaths in a fictional universe populated with middle-class professionals, Emelonye fell back on Old Nollywood narrative tropes.[26] It likewise comes as little surprise that even Afolayan's much celebrated *The Figurine* does not quite succeed in disciplining the specter of occult economies, since neither the believers in the occult nor the skeptics ever gain the upper hand in the film. In ending with both sides at parity, the film does not only acknowledge that middle-class wealth can disappear just as quickly as it is acquired. Perhaps more importantly, the film also offers an underlying recognition of the unpredictability of both accumulation and dispossession in the current political and economic dispensation.[27]

Among the films discussed here, *Tango with Me* evinces the least amount of doubt regarding any possible gap between labor and accumulation in the neoliberal present. Lola and Uzo's financial stability is never threatened by the trauma they endure. However, even when there is no reason to fear a loss of middle-class privileges, one will not necessarily be in a position to derive all the possible benefits from one's access to such privileges. Those who enjoy those privileges will always be in danger—in danger of bodily harm and of psychological torture from unspecified social forces beyond their control, if not in danger of material deprivation. Whatever the reasons may be, middle-class living remains precarious. That the story revolves around difficult issues like those of rape and a pregnancy resulting from rape is understandable, for these are experiences that would be deeply unsettling even in the absence of material deprivation. The fact that these kinds of experiences allow for an engagement with questions of morality is convenient, since the film proposes the domain of morality as the only possible site for closing the gulf between expectation and reality. Rape, an unwanted pregnancy, and abortion matter mainly insofar as they provide the characters with an opportunity to exercise a level of agency that virtually nothing can curtail in the only realm—that of morality—in which they need to exercise agency. In *Tango with Me*, we have both the expression of absolute confidence in the individual's ability to practice "the science of the self" and an acknowledgement of the constancy of uncertainty even for those who have mastered this "science." *Tango with Me*'s evangelical sensibilities resonated with audiences in Nigeria and the Nigerian diaspora already accustomed to Old Nollywood's morality tales. But as Haynes (2014) points out, the conservative stance taken in this film on a politically volatile subject would probably limit its appeal for the generally more liberal spectators of non-Western films in the Western world. In the area of politics, if not in aesthetics, New Nollywood is perhaps not always as distant from its predecessors as New Nollywood proponents would like to think.

In elucidating the particular orientation of their films and the differences from Old Nollywood films, New Nollywood filmmakers most often refer to their concern for "higher production values"—a recurrent theme in interviews with diverse New Nollywood filmmakers.[28] Among some

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Ghanaian filmmakers, calls for professionalism in the local film industry that have also resulted in a new style of filmmaking would appear to reflect similar concerns.[29] These responses to prevailing standards of filmmaking in Nigeria and Ghana might be fruitfully positioned alongside "production fictions" elsewhere in the world. Ganti (2012:12), for example, details how filmmakers in the Bollywood film industry resorted to their own "production fictions" as a way of managing uncertainty in local film production and distribution. New Nollywood's discourse on higher production values represents a similar kind of move, an attempt to manage a crisis in local film production and distribution. These are interventions intended to bring order and relative predictability into an unstable work environment. As production fictions, they are likewise articulations of intent, only partly fulfilled, exposing strain and disagreement. The debate among New Nollywood filmmakers recounted earlier over how best to formulate an appropriately happy ending is just one example of the kind of tensions that may come to light when a commitment to advancing new interpretations for the expected outcome of work runs counter to the experience of the interpreter. In such circumstances, new rationalities are defended, but old rationalities retain their appeal.

While New Nollywood filmmakers are ambivalent about the term "Nollywood" itself, because it often leads to an assessment of their work in relation to Old Nollywood, Nigerian filmmaking is known outside Africa (and even outside Nigeria) mainly by this term. New Nollywood filmmakers have had to resign themselves to being positioned through references to "Nollywood" whenever their films attract publicity outside Africa.[30] The inability of New Nollywood filmmakers to evade the specter of the term "Nollywood" might be a metaphor for the current status of this "new wave." Formal proclamations of rupture with previous storytelling practices must contend with the prevailing conditions for the production and reception of narrative at a given point in time. To the extent that calculations in accounting for the returns on labor have not undergone fundamental change, products of a new wave will often remain caught between competing logics. One might say that the new wave derives at least part of its claim to novelty from the struggle to transcend competing logics and rationalities. We find traces of this struggle in the inability of many New Nollywood films to fully embrace an orthodox neoliberal script for Africa, or to fully repudiate Old Nollywood narrative tropes and devices.

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Notes

1. See, for example, Okome and Haynes (1995) and Haynes (2000) on Structural Adjustment Programs and Nigerian cinema.
2. See, for example, Jamie Peck (2001) and James Ferguson (2009:169,172), who describe the goals of SAPs in Africa as the "neoliberal restructuring" of local economies.
3. In this respect Harvey (2005:159) remarks, "the main arenas of production that gained were the emergent cultural industries (films, videos, video games, music, advertising, art shows), which use IT as a basis for innovation and the marketing of new products."
4. See, for example, Kapur and Wagner (2011); Miller (2006); Sánchez Prado (2014); Ives (2007); Olorunnisola (2009); and Christensen (2013).
5. The phrase "moral economy" refers to a distinctive framework for morality that has its own peculiar economic and wider social ramifications. For more on the moral economy, see Ekeh (1975); Olivier de Sardan (1999); and Smith (2007).
6. Judging by Connor Ryan's recent interview (2014) with three director–producers, the crisis of overproduction continues.
7. For evidence of this preoccupation with production values in Nigerian film-making among New Nollywood filmmakers, see, for example, Ali-Balogun (2009); Curry (2010); Rice (2012); Emelonye (2013); and Afolayan (2013).

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8. The first Nollywoodweek Paris event, described as a festival of Nigerian cinema, took place in Paris from May 30 to June 2, 2013. The fact that discussion of the film's ending also appears in various online forums suggests that concern about this subject and Nollywood's storytelling devices extends well beyond the circle of film professionals. Also present at the discussion over the ending of the film were Tunde Kelani and Keke Bongos, whose films were also showing at this film festival.
9. The relationship between Nollywood and the rest of African cinema has been explored in a number of works, notably Haynes (2011); Şaul and Austen (2010); and Diawara (2010).
10. Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff (1999:279) define "occult economies" as "the deployment, real or imagined, of magical means for material ends." This observation about occult economies applies in particular to Old Nollywood films about the acquisition of wealth, which almost always involve egregious moral deficiencies or an interaction with the domain of the occult. While Old Nollywood films cover a wide range of themes and concerns, the acquisition of wealth is most frequently depicted in these terms. By and large, the occult as a specifically money-making device is either absent from New Nollywood films or called into question, as evident in Afolayan's *The Figurine*.
11. At the same time, New Nollywood offers more realistic portrayals of poverty. Unlike in Old Nollywood films, poverty is not necessarily a transitional condition in New Nollywood, and is simply one setting among others in which individuals have the opportunity to make choices that propel the narrative forward. We see this, for example, in the family of Mary in *Phone Swap*. Though her family is poor, the story does not revolve around her family's attempt to become rich; rather it has to do with the loss of Mary's phone. Thus, while not all New Nollywood characters are well-to-do, when we do encounter such characters, they are not focused on an unending struggle for wealth.
12. In Nigerian popular culture and films, the word "runs" refers to high-class prostitution. Many films have been made about this subject, e.g., *Runs* (2002). Many of the moral code violations relate to filial obligations and or gender roles, especially for female characters.
13. In tandem with the movement away from a preoccupation with occult and moral economies, coincidence as an explanation for unanticipated outcomes has become more commonplace in New Nollywood stories. See, for example, *Confusion Na Wa* (2013), in which the protagonist declares, "Things don't happen for a reason, things just happen."
14. In a neoliberal state, writes Harvey, "individual success or failure are interpreted in terms of entrepreneurial virtues or failings (such as investing significantly enough in one's own human capital through education) rather than being attributed to any systemic property . . ." (2005:65–66).
15. As an example of acting without reference to occult economies, the New Nollywood film *Confusion Na Wa* does not show its protagonist, a petty criminal named Charles, engaging in crime in order to become wealthy or using magical means. Rather, crime is a profession to which he is committed. Indeed, for the most part his predominant goals in life appear to be "smoking weed" and tricking or forcing nubile maidens into having intercourse with him. Crime is simply the means for sustaining these pleasures.
16. See, for example, *Street Fame* (2005), a story of armed robbery in which the victim, Austin, unknowingly falls in love with Elisabeth, who is also partner to

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Flash, a notorious robber. Elisabeth reciprocates Austin's affection but then has to live in fear of being exposed for her criminal past.

17. The call for an "African Renaissance" was first made by Thabo Mbeki in the late 1990s after apartheid rule came to an end. Although Mbeki's initial interventions on this subject merely provided a more expansive and inclusive definition of African identity, the project of African renaissance became increasingly associated with the neoliberal policies implemented by Mbeki after he became president of South Africa (see Vale & Maseko 1998; Ferguson 2006). Similarly, the "Africa Rising" narrative as elaborated by *The Economist* in 2011 and a number of other prominent news magazines in the West proclaimed the successful implementation of neoliberal policy in Africa with attendant benefits such as the emergence of "motivated entrepreneurs and increasingly prosperous consumers." In this article I discuss both discourses as examples of neoliberal orthodoxy as applied to Africa.
18. The term "moral occult" comes from Brooks's (1976) study of early melodrama in Europe. In pairing the words *occult* and *morality*, I wish to advance conversation on how Nollywood's occult-inspired films can be positioned by comparison with genres like horror and fantasy that are more frequently associated with Western cinema, a question also asked by Pfaff (2012) and Brown (2015). Tsika (2015) similarly calls for an evaluation of generic classification in and outside Nollywood more broadly. My suggestion here is that Old Nollywood's occult sphere prefigures a concern with morality that is not typical of New Nollywood engagements with the occult. Partly on account of the preoccupation with morality, Old Nollywood's representations of the occult would appear to differ from horror and fantasy narratives elsewhere in the world much more significantly than New Nollywood narratives do.
19. The same is true for poor characters. And when poor characters in New Nollywood films seek wealth, they do so without resorting to the moral occult or claiming moral justification for their actions. Nor does narrative resolution require a demonstration of remorse or the levying of penalties if by chance these poor individuals engage in criminal activity.
20. Thus the majority of films currently released in Nigeria adhere more closely to Old Nollywood forms of storytelling than to those of New Nollywood. They may be "new" films, but they are not New Nollywood films for the most part.
21. For example, Obi Emelonye received law degrees from universities in the U.K. and then acquired experience with media production working for BEN TV, a cable television channel offering content for black communities in Britain. Mahmood Ali-Balogun studied dramatic arts and filmmaking at Obafemi Awolowo University in Nigeria and then proceeded to work in television and theater before venturing into documentary and later into feature film production. Chineze Anyaene studied filmmaking at the New York Film Academy after obtaining a bachelor's degree in theater arts from the University of Abuja in Nigeria.
22. The term "read-write" multimedia literacy comes from John Hartley (2009), who contrasts "read-write" with "read-only" multimedia literacy. Those with "read-write" literacy can both consume and produce multimedia, while those with "read-only" capability can consume but not produce. I have borrowed the term here to distinguish New Nollywood production, often led by singular and often highly educated individuals who have formal training in filmmaking, directing, financing, and often acting. In Old Nollywood filmmaking, the producers were

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often distinguished from the actual directors with filmmaking skills and may not have received any significant training in filmmaking.

23. Kunle Afolayan's father was the celebrated Yoruba filmmaker Ade Love. Afolayan first came to the attention of Nigerian filmmakers with his performance in *Saworoide* (1999), by Tunde Kelani, another noted filmmaker. He later obtained a degree in accounting and worked in banking for a few years before deciding to attend the New York Film Academy at its branch in London to learn digital filmmaking. In addition to four films, he has also directed a widely praised documentary on Yoruba culture, titled *Isedale*, for the South African satellite channel Africa Magic.
24. See Hoad (2012). It is also worth noting that the majority of films shown in these new cinema theaters are not Nigerian films, but Hollywood films. Although additional cinema theaters are under construction, at this point only a sliver of Nollywood's total output can count on theatrical exhibition within or outside Nigeria.
25. For example, Afolayan was so devastated by the widespread illegal reproduction and sale of his movie *October 1*, released late in 2014, that he and other filmmakers and actors took to the streets of Lagos on April 20, 2015, in a peaceful march decrying the effects of piracy on Nigerian filmmaking. See "Movie Stars Stage Walk against Piracy" (http://saharareporters.com).
26. As it turns out, Emelonye's concern for narrowing the gap between reality and claims of African economic ascendancy may not have been entirely misplaced. Just days before *Last Flight to Abuja* was to premiere in Nigeria in 2012, the country suffered its second deadliest airplane crash, a flight from Abuja to Lagos in which 153 passengers and crew were killed as well as several others on the ground. I can only speculate here, but I assume that had Emelonye's film been a typical disaster film with many casualties, it might not have been quite as successful with Nigerian cinemagoers, coming as it did in the aftermath of yet another in a string of deadly crashes in Nigeria.
27. *The Figurine* ends with the following question addressed to the audience that appears on the screen: "What do you believe?" In other words, do you believe Sola and Mona lost their wealth due to the curse of the figurine, or simply by happenstance. This question makes sense only for an audience in which some of the spectators might actually believe in the curse of the figurine, and not for a public that has already ruled out that possibility. Through this question, the film acknowledges again the prevailing currency of the moral occult for Nigerian film audiences. It is also worth noting here that unlike in American horror movies, there are no signs that either technology or even personal courage can shed light on the mystery of the figurine.
28. As evidence of their success in achieving higher production values, New Nollywood filmmakers often cite with pride the occasions when their films have been included in official selections at (usually diasporic) film festivals, and state that their goal is to make films whose production values qualify them for inclusion at such venues. For New Nollywood filmmakers, the symbolic capital earned through selection at film festivals in Europe and North America often represents the ultimate marker of difference from Old Nollywood. For more on this subject, see Curry (2010) and Emelonye (2013).
29. The move toward professionalism in Ghana's film industry stemmed from a different type of crisis, especially the deregulation of media starting in the 1990s (see Garritano 2013). What professionalism means in New Nollywood differs

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somewhat from what professionalism signifies in the Ghanaian film industry. The goal is not simply to produce "secular, sanitized" narratives, though this is often the effect. Also, New Nollywood films do not necessarily represent middle-class living as typical for most of the population in the way "professional" Ghanaian films do (Garritano 2012:127). If, however, the main characters in a New Nollywood film are from the middle class, no particular attention is directed at their class positioning.

30. For example, the Nollywoodweek film festival in Paris in June 2013 invoked the name "Nollywood" but showed no Old Nollywood films.

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